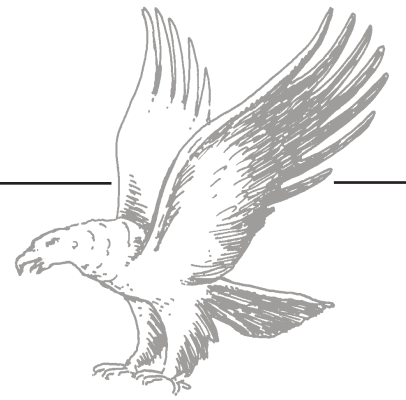


Wings

*"Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles."
Isaiah 40:31*



December 11, 2016

More and More

The great command to "love your neighbor as yourself" is easy to recite. But learning how to live it fully and consistently will take a lifetime of hard work and practice.

"May the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all" (1 Thess. 3:12).

"We urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God" (1 Thess. 4:1).

"But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, . . . But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more" (1 Thess. 4:9-10).



Paul's readers had been instructed well in the importance of loving one another—so much so that Paul said there was really no need to write further about it. Then he writes about it *three times* in the space of twelve verses. Were the Thessalonians slow learners, or is there something else going on here?

Note that Paul is not merely reiterating the importance of loving others. Rather, he is emphasizing the *growth* of that virtue in our character. We are to "increase and abound in love," and "increase more and more." Anybody can

perform an occasional act of goodwill; but it takes a committed disciple to develop the art of serving others into a truly transformative way of life.

It's easy to love spouses, kids, and close friends. But what about total strangers to whom we owe no obligation? What about those people (including our brethren) who rub us the wrong way, people whom we would just as soon not be around? And what about (*gasp!*) our enemies—those awful people who have mistreated or abused us in some fashion? Can any of us claim that we have fully mastered *that* kind of love?

Even the Old Testament taught us to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18), so there is nothing new about this principle. But no one ever really grasped what that meant in practical terms until Jesus came along. Jesus drew the approbation of the religious leaders of His day, not so much because of what He *taught*, but because of what He *did*: befriending the outcasts, the fallen, the throw-aways of society. His behavior scandalized the morality police because they couldn't recognize what He was

doing. He exalted the Old Testament law of love to the highest level—second only to loving God—and demonstrated it in His treatment of those who had received so little of it in their lives. His compassion for these unlovables gave them hope that their lives meant something to God—something Jesus' critics could never grasp.

The critics had Jesus eliminated, but even in death His love exceeded all known interpretations of that law. How else can we explain His dying prayer to "forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Lk. 23:34)? Could *I* be so magnanimous in a similar situation?

That's why Paul's injunction to the Thessalonians was so timely then—and still necessary today. The gap between Jesus' life of love and our own is enormous, and we will spend the rest of our lives just trying to understand that kind of love, much less practice it.

Have we performed some noble deeds of love in our lives? If so, that's great—but we still have a long way to go to match our Savior's example. We must "increase more and more."

— David King